

Developing and sustaining food hygiene through behavioural intervention - Food safety at the London 2012 Olympics

How the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) worked in partnership with Cognisco to create a bespoke scenario based assessment for food safety management

Objective

During the build up to the London 2012 Olympics, a lot of thought, planning and preparation went into ensuring that food safety systems and processes were in place to minimise risk. Although the majority of cases of foodborne illnesses are mild, some can lead to serious or long-term conditions, or even death.

The Olympics presented the Food Standards Agency (FSA) with particular challenges regarding food safety management of small Food Business Operators (FBOs).

The sheer size and scale of the visitor numbers at such an event was likely to put a high demand on the FBOs in and around the Olympic venues. If not managed safely, this demand could pose a significant risk to the public due to foodborne illness.

Addressing actual work-based behaviours considered to be high risk in terms of food hygiene and safety was the objective that the FSA tasked the NSF and Cognisco with.

Approach

Cognisco's team of occupational psychologists, HR specialists and food safety expert, worked with the NSF to design a bespoke scenario-based assessment.

The assessment measured the FBO manager's levels of knowledge, understanding and confidence in relation to the principles of good food hygiene, known as the 4Cs (Cleaning, Cooking, Cross-contamination and Chilling) which had been promoted by the FSA in earlier initiatives. Other topics included temperature controls, monitoring and due diligence, personal hygiene and pest control.

The scenarios which Cognisco and the NSF created were structured to assess individuals' judgements in given situations and were designed to suit small, yet diverse, food business operators and their employees.

In addition to the assessment, a short attitudinal questionnaire was administered and on-site behavioural observations were conducted by Environmental Health Officers. These combined measures provided a unique platform for targeted behavioural coaching and training for the FBO managers.

Delivered

The results of the assessment revealed each individual's level of risk, awareness, knowledge and confidence in every one of the areas examined.

The collective approach highlighted the importance of identifying where gaps exist in knowledge and understanding, so that training could be tailored to the individual needs.

Behavioural coaching and online supportive videos were provided to address the behaviours where the greatest need was identified.

In addition, practical experiential sessions to apply knowledge were delivered, allowing the individuals to experience the correct procedures first hand whilst at the same time appreciate the consequence of not doing so.

The power of utilising attitude and behavioural interventions lead to impactful and sustainable food safety practices being implemented across the FBOs.

NSF and Cognisco won the SOFHT Best New Product Award 2012 for the London 2012 food safety initiative.